

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR RELEASE SUNDAY, JANUARY 16, 1966

WASHINGTON, D.C. January 16, 1966. Daniel in the Lions' Den, a powerful early work by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) has been acquired by the National Gallery of Art through the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.

According to John Walker, Director of the National Gallery, it is one of the few large pictures (88-1/4 in. x 130-1/8 in.) by the 17th-century Flemish master which is known to have been painted entirely by his own hand.

Although Rubens often rose at 4 a.m. and worked until the daylight faded, he needed a staff of artists to keep up with all his commissions.

The fact that he painted the Daniel alone, contrary to his usual practice for large pictures, is confirmed in a letter he wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton, the British Ambassador to The Hague, in 1618. The letter, which is now in the Office of Public Records, London, concerns a transaction in which Rubens exchanged paintings (including the Daniel) and money for Sir Dudley's collection of antique marbles. In his own handwriting Rubens described the picture as "Daniel amidst many lions, which are taken from the life. Original, the whole by my hand." He valued it at 600 florins and gave its size as 8 by 12 "pieds."

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Sir Dudley, later named Lord Dorchester by Charles I, presented the picture to his ill-fated monarch about 1639. After the Revolution, the Scottish Dukes of Hamilton owned it intermittently from the early 1640's until 1919 when it passed into a lesser known English collection.

In making the announcement of the acquisition, Mr. Walker said, "A painting of such high artistic quality and historical importance is a noteworthy addition to the National Gallery's treasures and, thereby, to the cultural resources of the entire nation."

Painted in 1615, only a few years after the artist's return to Antwerp from Italy where he spent the formative period of his career, Daniel in the Lions' Den reveals the highly individual gifts of a great master.

At the age of 38, Rubens was on the threshold of his mighty, innovating style.

Based on the Biblical account of the young prophet's miraculous escape from slaughter by lions in a subterranean den, the picture depicts the moment of Daniel's thanksgiving for divine protection during the night. At dawn, as the stone for the tomb is rolled away by order of the king, Daniel is seen unharmed, in earnest prayer amid the awakening beasts.

The painting is typical of Rubens' production during the second decade of the 17th century. There is great subtlety in the glowing blond reflections cast by the lions' fur; the color is generally uniform and subdued. There is also a clarity and precision in drawing which was acquired with the assistance of studies done from life and from antique models. Among these

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studies is a magnificent sketch for the figure of Daniel in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Studies for the lions are in the Albertina in Vienna, the British Museum in London and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Still governed by classical restraints, Daniel in the Lions'  
Den leads the way to the fully mature works which gave Rubens his unrivaled position as the greatest painter of the High Baroque.

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Color transparencies and black-and-white glossy photographs on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565. Area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 225.